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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CARACAS 001274

SIPDIS

HQSOUTHCOM FOR POLAD
DEPARTMENT PASS TO AID/OTI (RPORTER)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/12/2018
TAGS: [PREL](#) [CASC](#) [PGOV](#) [ASEC](#) [VE](#)
SUBJECT: CHAVEZ EXPELS U.S. AMBASSADOR

REF: A. LA PAZ 1942
[1](#)B. CARACAS 1271

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR FRANCISCO FERNANDEZ,
REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. President Chavez announced the expulsion of the Ambassador and recall of the Venezuelan Ambassador in Washington during two televised political rallies the evening of September 11 (Ref A). Chavez said he was expelling the "Yankee Ambassador" to show solidarity with the Bolivian President, which had expelled the U.S. Ambassador there on September 10. On the 35th anniversary of the military coup in Chile, Chavez drew parallels with "aggressions" against his government and threatened to defend his "Bolivarian revolution." He also accused the USG of planning to send fighter planes to bomb Venezuela's presidential palace and of supporting violent protests in Bolivia. As of the morning of September 12, the MFA has not yet followed up with a diplomatic note on the expulsion. With key state and local elections still slated for November, Chavez's picking a fight with the USG is almost certainly an effort to distract public attention from domestic problems and rally his fractured supporters. End Summary.

"Go to Hell, Sh-tty Yankees"

[1](#)2. (SBU) During a nationally televised September 11 political rally in Carabobo State before tens of thousands of supporters, President Chavez ordered the expulsion of the Ambassador and a "reevaluation" of U.S.-Venezuela bilateral relations. Looking at his watch, Chavez bellowed "The Yankee Ambassador has 72 hours from this moment to leave Venezuela! In solidarity with Bolivia and the people of Bolivia and the government of Bolivia!" He also instructed Foreign Minister Nicolas Maduro to recall BRV Ambassador in Washington Bernie Alvarez "before (the USG) throws him out of there." Chavez said the BRV will send a new ambassador to Washington when "there is a new government there, when there's a government that respects the people of Latin America." Chavez then screamed into the microphone, "Go to Hell, sh-tty Yankees, here we are a dignified people....Go to Hell 100 times over!"

[1](#)3. (SBU) Chavez also accused the USG of being responsible for "all the conspiracies" against Latin America. He also threatened to cut off oil to the United States in response to any "forthcoming aggression." Earlier the same day, senior

BRV officials accused the USG of being behind an alleged coup/assassination plot against President Chavez (Ref B). The Venezuelan government announced the detention of several active duty military officers, and the National Assembly announced the formation of a special commission to investigate such an alleged plot. National Assembly President Cilia Flores publicly accused opposition groups and prominent members of the independent media of being involved (Septel).

14. (SBU) Chavez also held a follow-on September 11 nighttime rally in front of thousands of persons convoked at the Miraflores Presidential Palace ostensibly "to defend the Bolivarian revolution." In calmer, but still threatening language, Chavez promised to defend himself against external "aggressions" and internal plots. He reiterated that he is expelling the Ambassador and accused the USG of backing violent demonstrations in Bolivia and planning to use fighter aircraft to bomb Miraflores. During his August 30 television broadcast of "Alo, Presidente," President Chavez threatened to expel the Ambassador if "he did not watch his words" after the Ambassador had reiterated the need for greater bilateral counternarcotics cooperation.

No Diplomatic Note As Yet

15. (C) As frequently is the case, the MFA was caught completely flat-footed by Chavez's expulsion of the Ambassador. A/DCM contacted MFA Protocol Director Ramon Gordils requesting official clarification of Chavez's public

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remarks. The MFA Protocol Director insisted that Chavez's verbal announcement constituted an official order of expulsion according to the Vienna Convention, but said the MFA would send a written clarification to the Embassy on September 12.

16. (C) As of noon local time on September 12, the MFA still has not delivered the notice. A/DCM and EconCouns met the afternoon of September 11 with MFA North American Affairs Director Yaneth Arocha to discuss the TSA transportation warning. Arocha gave no indication of any imminent BRV action with regard to the Ambassador. As of the morning of September 12, only a few AmCits have contacted the Embassy seeking further information on the expulsion.

Comment

17. (C) Although Chavez has threatened to expel U.S. ambassadors before, this is the first time he has done so. Chavez's expulsion of the Ambassador is unprecedented in 173 years of U.S.-Venezuelan diplomatic relations. Moreover, Chavez's vituperative rhetoric against "Yankees" could potentially incite hard-core Chavistas to target official Americans and dependents. Embassy is convening an EAC meeting to address that concern.

18. (C) With key state and local elections still slated for November, Chavez's sudden decision to pick a fight with the USG is almost certainly part of an effort that includes denunciations of coup plots and attacks on the private media to distract public attention from his administration's domestic problems as well as to unite his fractured supporters. The expulsion and BRV coup allegations are generating significant local media attention and stealing media attention from the political influence peddling and corruption revelations emerging from the trial of Venezuelan citizen Franklin Duran in Miami. Opposition leaders are also expressing concern that Chavez may be laying the groundwork for a severe crackdown on the democratic opposition and the postponement of November's state and local elections.

